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# The Adventist Woman In The Secular World: Her Ministry and Her Church

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**THE ADVENTIST WOMAN  
IN THE SECULAR WORLD:**

**HER MINISTRY  
AND HER CHURCH**



# THE ADVENTIST WOMAN IN THE SECULAR WORLD:

## HER MINISTRY AND HER CHURCH

BY

Jennifer Knight

Pamela Clifford

Merolyn Coombs

Linette Lock

- For Tamsin -

*We have delighted in your whimsical ways and welcomed interruptions as we have spent long evenings in your mum's study. We trust that our work will allow you and the generation you represent to utilise fully your God-given gifts and abilities.*

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*by Jennifer Knight, Pamela Clifford, Merolyn Coombs, and Linette Lock*

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# FOREWORD

There are of course a number of people the Taskforce would like to thank for assisting us in this project. Firstly, Dr Alf Birch, who took the gamble and invited a woman to head up one of his dreams - the Toward 2000 Taskforces - and then gave the OK for her to conscript three other women to help out; to Pr David Currie for his wonderful encouragement and support as Project Coordinator after Alf left Australia; to Dr Gerald Clifford who had the difficult job of picking up the threads.

Technical assistance was readily provided by Dr Terry Butler who performed the computations and Lloyd Sharp who typeset the survey and provided a very professional finish to our work.

Our sincere thanks go to all those women who took time out from their incredible schedules to complete our survey. Many did more than tick a box and provided us with an insight into their pain and needs. We sincerely trust that we have spoken on your behalf with integrity and accuracy.

To our husbands and, in some instances, children, who ungrudgingly freed us to meet and work together over a two and one-half year period, who listened to our heartache as we shared survey responses with them and read draft copy and offered comment.

As Chair of the Taskforce I would particularly like to thank three outstanding women who assisted in the preparation of this Report. I have come to respect and appreciate these women over the years we worked together. The one disadvantage of completing this project is that we won't get to chat nearly so often. Thank you Lin, Merolyn and Pam. I also thank my husband, James Smith. As always James you encouraged, challenged and offered support throughout the duration of this exercise.

To you all, thank you.



(Dr) Jennifer Knight  
Chair



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# INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades gender stereotypes have been challenged. The ideals of women in the '50s and '60s revolved around motherhood and home. In the '70s and '80s the dream increasingly focused upon being accepted as an equal in the labour force and having fewer family-related constraints. As society moves into the '90s the average Australian and New Zealand woman believes it is her right to be a mother and a career woman as well as to have a relationship that is void of conflict and tension (Barna, 1990:69). Accompanying this trend are greater numbers of women in the business and professional domains holding positions within the work force in areas other than the traditional "nurturing" professions such as nursing and teaching. Today, more women work in professions as diverse and skilled as finance and economics, politics, tertiary education, medicine, law, science and technology, engineering and architecture.

The influx of women in the work place has been supported and encouraged by federal and state government Equal Employment Opportunity policies which legislate against employers discriminating on the grounds of (amongst other factors) gender.

## Women in the Church

As women have taken a more active place in the work environment, it was natural, even inevitable, for them to seek greater participation within their worship environments and the decision making processes of their churches. In this desire, women have met with both support and opposition.

On one hand are those who claim women should maintain a subordinated role in the church. The Biblical analogy between Christ (head of the church) and man (head of the family) is used to substantiate a position that suggests it is inappropriate for women to seek headship over men by taking on leadership (e.g. preaching) roles.

Others maintain that such Biblical passages need to be considered within the context of the culture of the time. Claims are also made that basic Christian concepts such as justice and equality support an increased involvement of women in the affairs of the church. It is argued that women should be able to exercise the spiritual gifts they feel have been given to them, even if the gifts are other than the traditionally accepted ones of hospitality and nurturance, and include preaching, teaching and administering.

The extent to which women wish to participate in the church varies considerably. Some wish to work for the church as full time and recognised ministers, evangelists and administrators. Numerous lay women, on the other hand, seek to exercise their gifts more fully in their ministry to their families, their church and their secular work colleagues.

Regardless however of the desire of many women to participate more fully in the life of their church, and despite numerous taskforces, research committees and commissions examining the issue, the mission of women within the Adventist church remains unresolved and confused.

## Consideration of the Issue

The issue of women and the church has been considered over the past two years by a group of Sydney women who were specifically asked by the South Pacific Division to consider ways Adventist business and professional women in the secularised nations of the South Pacific could best minister to their work colleagues. As the topic was explored the group found there to be very little information available to answer important background questions such as: